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“The Spirit of '76”

BY

JAMES H. CANFIELD



“La Fayette”

BY

HENRY D. ESTABROOK

Addresses delivered before the
Quill Club of New York at its
meeting of February 19th, 1907

Printed by order of the Club

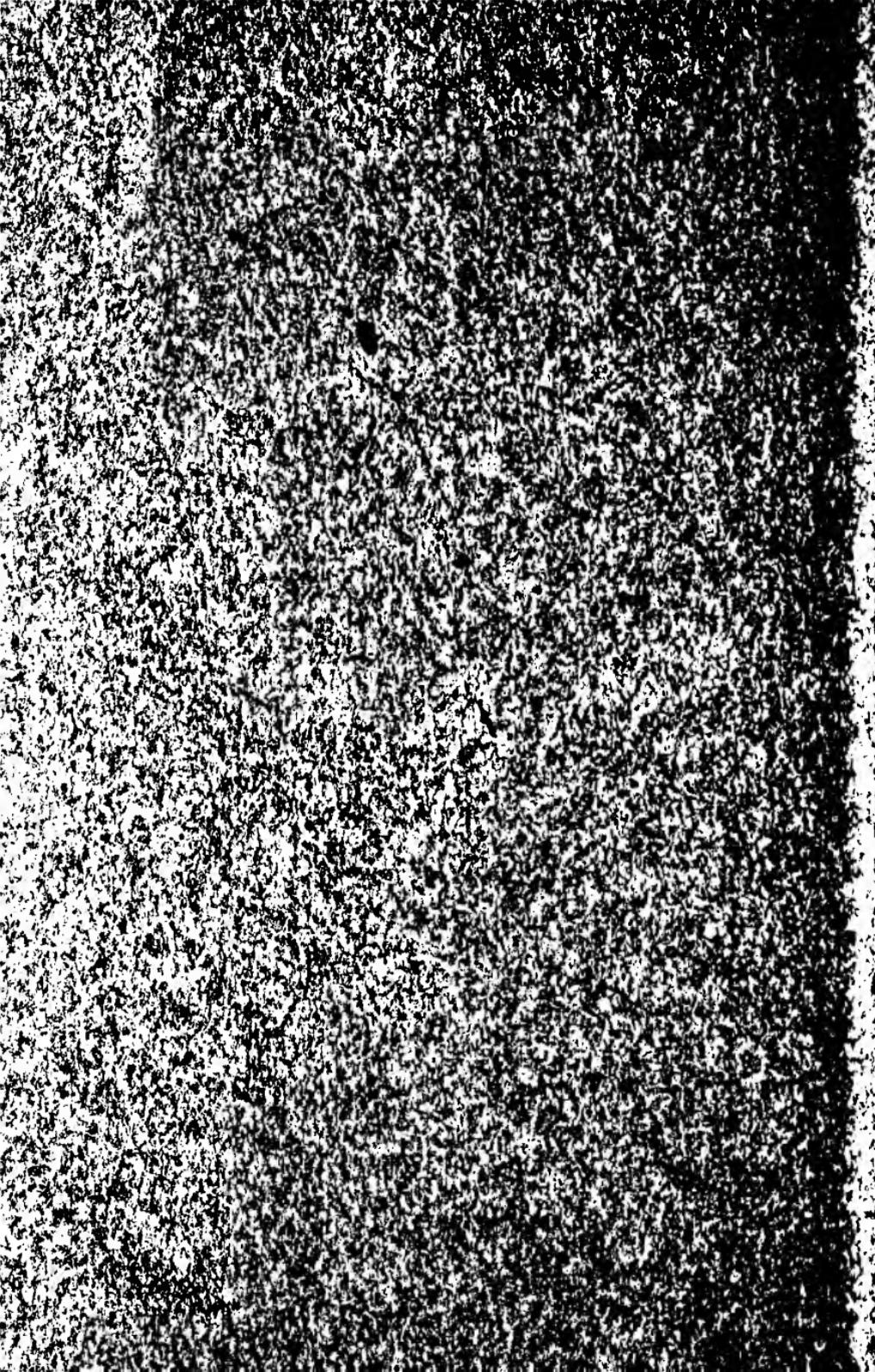




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WASHINGTON AND LA FAYETTE.



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THE SPIRIT OF '76.

It is a very pleasant task which has been assigned to me this evening, that of preparing the way for my eloquent friend who is to delight you with what I am sure will be a brilliant portrayal of one of the most distinguished founders of our Republic. During four years of educational administration in Nebraska, Mr. Estabrook was one of our Regents, or trustees, and I learned to lean heavily upon him as a support which never failed. I am glad of this opportunity to testify to his unusual intelligence, faithfulness and loyalty in all University affairs. The people of that western commonwealth still owe him a very distinct debt of gratitude for the large and generous service which he then rendered, and my personal and official obligation to him was as great as it was manifest. I beg leave to welcome him to this assembly, as I have already welcomed him to the city, as an American of a type and character all too sadly needed and all too rarely met.

There is a certain phase of our history most surely worthy of profound study, without some knowledge of which we may search in vain for a thread to lead us through the labyrinth of later days. Every moment devoted to its consideration throws new light upon all our later struggles. The results of this study are such as to give us, at the same time, hope and courage and fear. It is full of glory, it is full of shame, it is full of reproach, it is full of encouragement, it is full of warning. It is something in our past which is more commanding than the details of our strife with savage nature or with either savage or civilized man. It is that which gives vital force to the life of our people. It is what perhaps we may vaguely call the genius of American institu-

tions. Popularly it is known as "The Spirit of '76."

Take for illustration such a movement as the Revolutionary movement, which though sudden and even somewhat unexpected in its actual manifestation, was not the offspring of a mere passing impulse. Nor are you for a moment to imagine that it was founded upon a tuppenny tea tax—a most inadequate explanation. Much more than that was needed to carry our ancestors through the long and dreary days of that painful conflict. There are material facts enough in those years of almost hopeless struggle—events which quicken the pulse and thrill the nerves and even dim the eyes in the mere recital. The smoke of burning Charlestown, the darkness of the night of the Delaware crossing, the winter of frightful suffering at Valley Forge, the marches and countermarches in Virginia and in the Carolinas, the utterly worthless paper money, the shameless veniality and profligacy and misrule of men in high places, the scant military stores—in which barrels of sand were more than once marked "gunpowder" to encourage the troops, the final surrender at Yorktown—and the mud-spattered, foam-flecked couriers who bore the glad tidings through village and town; all these we know and have known for many a year. But there is still a question as to whether we understand, and rightly and fully understand, the spirit which lay back of all this, which maintained the struggle in the face of such tremendous odds, which filled the shattered ranks of the army, which gave the conflict its true meaning, and which pushed bravely and insistently onward until a goal was reached which the most prophetic had not seen in their brightest visions and which caused a republic to spring out of a movement which we must admit at the outset simply sought relief from unjust legislation. And yet it was

this spirit which shaped the entire conflict and which directed all the material forces. That it was greater and more powerful than the material forces may be seen at a single glance. When compared with the importance of the questions decided, which were the real victories won in that Valley of Decision, which were the actual advances made, which involved principles then perhaps for the first time in the history of the world clearly expressed, and which we have never ceased to maintain and defend —when compared with all this, the instrumentalities seem even pitiful. There were but 2,400 Americans at Trenton, less than 6,000 English surrendered at Saratoga, Lincoln had less than 2,000 men at the siege of Charlestown, Cornwallis fought the battle of Camden with but 2,000 and the entire force which surrendered at Yorktown was only 7,000. Such battles are not more than skirmishes when compared with the work on the French frontier during the French Revolution, or with the campaigns of the first Napoleon, or with the forces engaged in the Franco-Prussian War, or with those engaged in the Civil War in this country. It seems clear then, that there must have been some great and overmastering impulse, some all-inspiring motive, some deep-seated purpose, some dominant principle; or neither from the colonial life in which men were trained and developed for such a time and for such trials, nor from the white heat of the conflict itself, could have been shaped results so grand and so enduring.

You will find this all the more surprising, though not inexplicable, when you remember what a simple-minded and simple-mannered folk our ancestors were. There was sufficient of the heroic and philosophic in them all, but as a race they were neither heroes nor philosophers. No matter from what stock they sprang, they were

largely of the middle class ; living in a quiet way, in what we, their somewhat faster and less reverent descendants, might call a rather humdrum way, supported largely by the labor of their own hands, with class distinctions greatly modified although they had not yet disappeared, obsolescent though not yet obsolete ; for the great part having no more apparent ambition than to secure for themselves the immediate advantages of life in the New World, and for their children the possibility of expansion without deprivation and without the necessity of swarming again from the hive. I am not sure that we over-rate the devotion to specific principles of that earlier day, certainly I have no desire to abate in the slightest the well-deserved praise of our fathers in the flesh. They had a strength of purpose and a purity of character and grip and grit which sometimes put us to the shame in the comparison and make us feel as though our own moral sinews were rather flabby. But after all they were no mere theorists, they were no knights-errant with a lofty mission constantly heralded to the world, they were no hobby-riders. They attacked original sin with hard blows, but they were just as sturdy in their dealings with the primæval forest or with the original savage. They drove out Roger Williams, but this was quite as much because he questioned their title to their land as because he differed with them in religion, or they thought had little or none of his own. They punished the Quakers, but this was really because disorder in the colony was opposed to thrift and they felt that the situation demanded that men should work as well as pray—and just then the Quakers seemed only inclined toward the latter. They themselves admitted very frankly that they came to this country not only to cultivate religion but to cultivate the soil as well, not only to worship God but to trade and to

catch fish. I am one of those who believe that the rigidity of Puritan faith and the simplicity of Puritan life and the austerity of Puritan manners and the intensity of Puritan character furnished this nation with about all the moral backbone it ever possessed; but I am also one of those who feel obliged to admit that the Puritans made sharp bargains with the simple Hollanders, and swapped the Indians out of their entire inheritance. The fact is that our Puritan progenitors were peculiar pocket-book people, they were eminently practical, they had all the staying and abiding and conservative traits of the English from which they sprang; but when the full time came they pledged their lives and their fortunes and their sacred honor to the maintenance of an idea, and they grandly redeemed the pledge.

It is only proper to remind you right here that the Puritans were not the only people in the country at the outbreak of the Revolution, nor were the Puritans the only people who possessed the genius which was to warm a slumbering continent into new life, nor was this genius restricted to the English-speaking race. When the mad tempest of war finally broke on our eastern coast, none were more loyal, none were more hopeful, none were more patient, none were more unselfish, none were more patriotic than our kinsmen from Holland and Germany and our neighbors from France. Whatever the impulse was, it seemed to belong to all. The spirit which brooded so mightily over the chaotic elements and which was destined to bring light out of darkness and order out of confusion and strength out of weakness, was common to all. A most interesting question is whence had this spirit come, what had given it birth, under what conditions had it been implanted in the hearts of these largely unconscious pioneers of freedom.

The answer to this will only be found when we recall again the entire dependence of the present upon the past, will only be found when we make a careful study of that past, may be found within the circle of the century one of whose most striking movements was emigration to this almost unknown land.

The pace of the world has always been so swift, so much has always been compressed into a hundred years, that at times it seems difficult to differentiate one century from another in the richness and fullness of its experience. Yet it is hard to name a century more prolific in great events than the one just named, more full of prophecy, more fruitful in magnificent scheming, more crowned with enthusiasm. The art of printing had just been discovered and was beginning to manifest its marvelous power. Great libraries were being brought together and for the first time were ministering somewhat adequately to scholastic needs, the revival of learning was quickening and uplifting all intellectual life. As Taine, ever brilliant, puts it, "For the first time men opened their eyes and saw." The discovery of this continent fired popular imagination as it had never been fired before. Men thronged the seas under every conceivable banner, seeking the New World. And while all was thus fervid and thus tensely strained, the Reformation, which you will recall as simply a grand struggle of the human mind for its own freedom—the Reformation started suddenly into life in Germany, and spreading swiftly through the north and west, stirred with tumultuous force the mind of all Christendom. That was the flash which touched with its white light not only kings and courtiers, bishops and scholars, but that which was far better—the vast common life of nations. This it was which made an age until now munificent, instantly heroic.

Following this or concurrent with it, and largely because of this, came a swift advance of the power of the people, a decadence of all past authority, a weakening of the rule of mere force, a constant and intelligent seeking after that legitimate sovereignty which represents the best there is of national existence, the will of the people. All this new life was full of warmth and emotion and idealism, yet it was vigorous and energetic and practical and constructive. It really seemed inspired, and before its impetuous onset all that was old and weak and obstructive gave way. The century was full to overflowing with philosophy and learning and genius and statesmanship—but it was also full of industry; and all these other qualities were constantly active, constantly at work, magnificently at work—all inspiring to great enterprises, all animated by vast hopes, all willing and anxious to undertake imperial plans.

You know there are times when there seems to be a general movement of the popular mind, possibly even of the world-mind, in a given direction. We speak of certain tendencies as “in the air”—we move on certain lines by a common impulse. I wish I could give you a clear impression of all that was “in the air” during this wonderful period. Think of the familiar names of men and of the familiar incidents which crowd the pages of that period of history, of what all these suggest, of the possible connection of all these with the New World, of the possible influence of all these upon the life in the New World. Michael Angelo died in the same year in which Laudonniere made his fatal settlement in the south, and less than a year before the settlement at St. Augustine. Titian lived until 1576. Galileo was condemned only five years before Harvard College was founded. The great Gun Powder Plot was concocted and thwarted

only two years before the settlement of Jamestown. Cervantes published *Don Quixote*, a book which was destined to laugh the last traces of feudalism and chivalry out of existence, just before John Smith reached Virginia. Both Shakespeare and Cervantes died on the same day, less than four years before the landing on the Massachusetts coast; and the first edition of the works of the great dramatist appeared in the year of the settlement at Plymouth. It was the very next autumn that Wentworth rose in Parliament and declared that the only issue before the English people was that the liberties, franchises, privileges and jurisdictions of Parliament are the ancient and undoubted birthright and inheritance of all subjects of England—and what rebel colonist would ever want a better text or better authority than that! Four years later began the administration of that grandest of Cardinals and greatest of statesmen, Richelieu. Kepler—ardent, restless, burning to distinguish himself—finished his great work and laid down in death when Winthrop was governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony. Roger Williams went down to Rhode Island not quite two years before the Scotch in their solemn league and covenant consecrated all they had and were to the cause of religious freedom—and only two years later the Long Parliament began its fateful session. Moliere was never more brilliant than in the year in which honest and testy one-legged Peter Stuyvesant was compelled by his weak fortifications and his weaker Council to surrender New Amsterdam to the English. Racine lived long enough to make a study of witchcraft in Massachusetts. Rubens, Rembrandt, Vandyke and Claude Lorrane were winning imperishable renown when Rhode Island and Connecticut and the Carolinas were struggling for charter rights and even for continued existence. Newton made his great

discovery and his equally great system known to the world in the year of the hiding of the Connecticut charter. Leibnitz discovered the differential calculus just as Phillip of Narragansett gave up the unequal struggle with the white man. Milton, who had written most stirring words in behalf of English freedom, died just as Edmund Andrus was made a royal governor and instituted a short-lived English tyranny in New England. Descartes, whose philosophy forms one of the great landmarks in the history of free thought, was at the very height of his power and reputation when the Catholics settled in Maryland. Grotius, the philosopher, jurist and statesman, was leader of the diplomatic service of Sweden when the first printing press was set up at Cambridge. Spinoza, who was long proscribed because of his bold and unconquerable love of truth, died just at the close of Bacon's rebellion. Now I do not wish you to look for any close connection between these; they are not like links in a chain, they are not related as cause and effect, there is no logical sequence. But they will serve to show you the stir and stress and strife of that period, a period of struggle with powers invisible, with the material world, and with man's very self.

But there were closer relations than these. Suppose we take the century nearest the more active colonial life of this country, that which closed with the subjection of New Netherlands, the year when the eastern and northern portion of our present national domain passed under the control of the English, the year 1664: and let us set as the initial date, the accession of Elizabeth in 1558. What mighty events are compressed between these two! There is the marvelous reign of the great Queen—great in spite of shameless mendacity, ungovernable passion, and base ingratitude: the coming in of the Stuarts,

headed by one who was shrewdly called the wisest fool in all Christendom; the revolt of Hampden and the ride of King Pym and the rise of the Commons; the downfall of Charles the First, most exemplary and most stupidly obstinate of monarchs; Cromwell and the Protectorate; and the final triumph of parliamentary and constitutional government. Side by side with this you must place the great Protestant struggle in France, the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the rise and reign of Henry of Navarre, pitiful Louis XIII., a king in name only with Richelieu as real master of the destinies of France, Mazarin, the philosophic statesman and the instructor of the great Louis, and some of the promise of his pupil. Southward rises the forty years' reign of Philip the Second, who with all his power lost on both sea and land, and with whose death Spain began a swift decline. The Netherlands revolted. Sweden awoke from its lethargy and was regenerated and redeemed. Within the limits of the century thus defined came the entire Thirty Years' War, full of sorrow and sacrifice and heroism, closing in the welcome Treaty of Westphalia. The rude Hollanders rescued their land from the ocean, wrought within that scanty basin a most majestic history, and made their country the center of a commerce whose sails whitened every known sea and whose merchants circled the globe.

Now remember that right out of the midst of that century, rent with war and red with strife, came the early settlers of America. Fresh from this constant strife, tempered by conflict, toughened in every sinew and fiber, with all the hope and zeal and splendid energy of that age coursing hot and almost riotous in veins and arteries, they sought the New World. Think of the English. There were men in these colonies who had sailed with Frobisher and Drake; who had filled the camps along

the coast and kindled the watchfires at the approach of the great Armada; who remembered how the Queen in her golden speech to her last Parliament had won her way back to the hearts of her people. There were men in these colonies who had served under Cromwell, who had seen the royal line broken and the royal banner trailed in the dust at Nasby and Marsten Moor, who had witnessed the faithful execution of the fundamental provision of that greater charter—the right to behead a king. Doubtless you all remember how Endicott at Salem cut the red cross out of the old banner of England, but he was only delivering one last home thrust at the hated religion of Spain. The Catholics of Maryland in accepting religious freedom were simply exemplifying the spirit of their fathers who fought for free England against an Armada which a Catholic had armed and a Pope had blessed. Wadsworth, in hiding the Connecticut charter, was only following the example and the leadership of the men who had resisted the ship-money and had refused benevolences.

Take the Huguenots. There was not a more generally influential, cultivated, dependable class in all America. The movement which they represented began in the cities, in the capital of France, in the universities and schools of learning. Nobles like Condé and Coligni were its leaders. Marguerite of Navarre had been its charmed and charming centre. In its ranks were nearly all the skilled artisans of France. These had given their country the most extensive and the most renowned manufactures which the world then knew. The commerce of the kingdom was largely in their hands. They were graceful and brave, pliant yet with a temper like steel, and they brought out of their home-conflict a nerve and an impetuosity which played a magnificent part on this side of the

Atlantic. Three presidents of the Continental Congress were of this lineage. Fanuel, whose hall was the "cradle of liberty," was the son of a Huguenot. Marion, the swamp fox, was the son of another. Huger and Jay and Laurens and Bayard and Gallatin—all these and more were given us by the blind zeal and bigoted partisanship which revoked the Edict of Nantes and harried all France until the most serviceable portion of its population had become exiles and strangers, seeking a far country.

Then there were the Hollanders, who came out from under the moulding hand of William the Silent. First of all sovereigns, first of all statesmen, had he sought to build up a great middle class, a strong third party. Patient, industrious, patriotic; trained in the common schools in which they then led the world; full of Protestant fervor and inheriting the old Teutonic spirit of individual freedom—these were the men who laid so well the foundations of the great future metropolis. Think of the whirlwind of strife which their ancestors had known. The Atlantic for sixty years was almost hidden with the smoke of their guns—now down under the shadow of Gibraltar, and again in the very streets of Antwerp and Leyden; fighting from every window, and when they had given their land back to the sea, fighting from the tree-tops. Think of their love of liberty and the sacrifices which they had made for it, through whole generations; and then perhaps for the first time you will begin to understand the spirit and the temper which they brought to the little village and the pleasant boueries along the banks of the majestic Hudson.

What came with the Swedes? Gustavus Adolphus, a monarch almost worshiped by his people, had raised Sweden to a signal point of power in European affairs.

With the first regular organized army known upon the Continent—the first army not made up of mercenaries, the first army with a regular commissary—he swept into the current of the Thirty Years' War most gallantly, carrying all before him. His followers prayed where others plundered and they sang where others swore. They dwelt under the shadow of their own lances and they cooked their food in the ashes of conquered towns. They fought for liberty and for Protestantism, and they won. Their king gathered in fortresses as a reaper gathers sheaves. Blind Catholicism laughed when it heard of his landing on the northern coast and sneered that this snow-king would soon melt before the rays of the imperial sun. But blind Catholicism fled in wild dismay as he approached. Before he took up this, his last work—and he said with prophetic utterance, "There is now no rest for me save the eternal"—he had restored order to his kingdom, he had given great encouragement to education, he had advanced the general welfare of his people, and he had sent out the colony which gave to the west shore of the Delaware the name of their beloved land. After his death in that fatal fog at Lutzen, Oxensteirn, his favorite minister, gave to these pioneers much encouragement and aid, and though they were soon absorbed in New Netherlands you can easily see what added impulse came in the lines of thoughtful endeavor, independent action, and simple, manly life.

Out of this century of strife, this generation of blood-shed, came also the Germans. It is stated as an historical fact that during that war three-fourths of the people perished and three-fourths of the dwellings were destroyed. But the independent spirit which made these people the great Protest-ants of the world was not touched—much less was it disheartened or dismayed.

The fire that ran along the ground, the iron hail that broke the branches of every tree, had only burned and beaten deeper and deeper into their minds and hearts courage and purpose and hope. In the New World were opportunities, in the New World were possibilities: and they chose the wilderness of God across the seas rather than the wilderness which man had made of the dear Fatherland, the home of the Teuton race.

I am wondering whether, after all, you see what I mean, what I am striving in a very inadequate way to suggest. No matter whence they came, whether from hot work at Edgehill or at Taunton, from facing Claverhouse and his dragoons at Loudon Hill or Monmouth at Bothwell Brig, from La Rochelle or the Garonne, from the marshes of Holland or from the snowy fields of Sweden, from plains swept by the guns of Tilly and Wallenstein or from the councils of Church and State, these forefathers of ours came out of a century of marvelous and widespread and intense activity of both mind and body, a century rich in genius and creative power; a century in which civil, mental and religious freedom advanced with strides never before known. This was the birthplace and the birthright of the American spirit, which has become the spirit of western civilization; this was the seed-time of individual independence and individual accountability and individual power. Planted in the soil of the New World, it had been growing silently but luxuriously for a century and a half before, at Concord, the embattled farmers fired the shot which echoed 'round the world. Born of struggle, endurance, aspiration, achievement; on this continent God gave it room, incentive, training. This, gentlemen, is our inheritance and our inspiration—this is "The Spirit of '76."

LA FAYETTE

Of course, by this time his fellow-members of the Quill Club know my friend Canfield well enough to take what he says not simply with a grain of salt, but absolutely in pickle. I know him of old. As he says, I was once a regent of the Nebraska University, of which institution, during the time, he was the Chancellor. To prepare myself for the duties of my office I looked up the word "regent" in the dictionary. It means a governor or ruler; but, like Mark Twain when he was suffering with a carbuncle and found that the dictionary defined "carbuncle" as a "precious jewel," I deprecate humor in a dictionary. For I found that so far from being a governor or ruler, my sole function as regent was to ascertain exactly what Canfield wanted and vote for it accordingly. He dominated everybody and rose superior to everything, and to-night has risen superior to truth itself. Was there ever a more perfidious betrayal of a friend than his introduction of me to this distinguished audience?

In his letter inviting, or rather ordering, me to speak here this evening, Mr. Canfield was frank enough to insinuate that my only remuneration would be the unusual privilege of associating for a little while with some people strictly respectable, but that it was useless for me to aspire to membership in the Quill Club because—well, because a line had to be drawn somewhere. He said that the Club had been organized by the editors of religious weeklies in the city of New York, who possibly knew that the individual quill of a religious editor was not a formidable weapon against the world, the flesh and the devil, but who thought maybe by combining their quills they could present to the common enemy *chevaux*

de frise that would make the fretful porcupine look like a pen-rack. There is an inference that the religious editors found themselves lonesome, for it was not long before they took in some other editors not quite so religious, and then finally, in a moment of abandon, took in the librarians. "And there they stopped," says Mr. Canfield; and it is high time they did, for unless Mr. Carnegie is headed off by somebody this last move will certainly insure to the Quill Club a numerous membership; though judging the ilk by what I know of Canfield it reconciles me somewhat to my exclusion.

But it is wonderful how the habit of domination still clings to brother Canfield, for, as I say, he not only summoned me to appear before you this evening, but directed that my speech should be appropriate to the month of February and Washington's Birthday—not about Washington, but apropos of Washington. He not only dictated my subject, but I am persuaded would have dictated my speech if I would have stood for it. I once told the people of Nebraska that Chancellor Canfield had the physique of a sawed-off Hercules and the static energy of dynamite. For sheer strenuousness he out-teddies Roosevelt, and *I* think is a pernicious example to the youth of any institution with which he is connected. This age is too strenuous. It needs tranquilizing and Canfield is no man for such a job.

The mandatory but encouraging remark made to a party of the name of Eli (whether to him of the Bible, or to him with the patronymic of Perkins, I wot not), to "get there, Eli!" has been hurled at every youth in this country with the least symptom of ambition. It is a genuine Americanism, in line with hustler and hummer and other words signifying inordinate activity and uncomfortable energy. Whether a man is running for a

street car or only for an office, he is admonished to get there. It is desirable, of course, that he get there with both feet; otherwise his foothold is uncertain, and his tenure as precarious as that of the old fellow Myron Reed tells about—one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel. The word “there” doubtless represents a goal of attainment; but it is a vague word, and wonderfully illusive. Whereabouts is “there”? What do we know of the *locus in quo*, as the lawyers say? It may be that, in the words of the gospel hymn, “there” is “a land that is fairer than day”; but we know nothing of its metes or bounds, or latitude or longitude, or, indeed, if it is on this planet or not. Like the fabled island, it seems to recede precisely as it is approached. The poor devil delving in a ditch hopes one day for a job that will keep him from the poorhouse. If he hustles he may get there, but he will not be satisfied. The business or professional man, in no danger of the poorhouse, nevertheless longs for leisure to indulge some dormant fancy. If he is a hummer he may get there, but he will not be satisfied. The rich man, with both means and leisure, yearns also for fame. If he “humps” himself he may get there, but he will not be satisfied. The famous man wishes for a title of nobility. In some countries he may achieve it; but he will not be satisfied.

Hear, then, the conclusion of the whole matter: Fame, riches, title—every object of worldly ambition, is an *ignis fatuus*.

And what is that? An incandescent miasma.

Do I, therefore, exclaim with the preacher: “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity”? There is not an ounce of pessimism in my composition. I mention this fact, this scientific and religious fact, not by way of exhortation or complaint; but simply because it explains a fact, known of

all men, and utilized by great men. For there is a moral quality to greatness which distinguishes it from cleverness.

Yes, the Almighty hath implanted in the human breast a divine unrest, which only finds its anodyne in ministering to others. Vainly the tentacles of our being clasp the favors of the world, dragging them into self; in the very delirium of gratified vanity there comes an apocalypse of self, and the naked soul shrivels in the glance of God! Is it not, I say, divine that the penalty of selfishness should be a nausea of self?

"Shall I," asks Balzac, "shall I tell you how to make your way in the world? You must plow through humanity like a cannon ball, or glide through it like a pestilence."

Dear old Balzac! prodigy of industry as you were of genius! Did you, from the poverty of your garret, croak dire philosophies? Thank God, your religion was better than your creed; for your self-devoted life has made you a way in the world higher than that of Napoleon, the cannon ball; or Robespierre, the pestilence; you are, while language lasts, Shakespeare of France!

Look you! Men will of course make way for a cannon ball, but what pleasure does the cannon ball have in that? It is of iron, without sensibility. If it have a feeling it is a feeling of pride, which is harder than iron and a thousand times more cruel. Men will succumb to a pestilence, but what joy does the pestilence take in that? Its crown is a wreath of snakes, its breath the vapor of graves, its laugh the gibber of a corpse.

Men and brethren, I have preached my sermon in advance. To take it out of the abstract of ethics into the concrete of experience, I propose to illustrate it by the life work of one man; not a genius, in the sense of that

mental bias we call genius, but a sane man, as Washington was sane; a good man, as Washington was good; a man who, born to every extrinsic advantage for which we worldlings moil—title, riches, social caste—flung all his birthrights to the wind, and then reconquered from the world the homage of mankind, and from heaven the approval of Jehovah. History has enshrined him, humanity may not forget him, France calls him father. Surely America, in whose name and for whose sake he yielded the title of “Noble” for that of “man,” bartered the coronet of a marquis for the toga of a citizen, giving to the word citizen, indeed, a significance and glory—America, whose Washington clasped him to his heart of hearts, and called him son—surely America will recall him thus forever joined: WASHINGTON AND LA FAYETTE.

How can I extract, condense, and fuse into the limits of this address the combined essence of his life and soul—a life crowded from youth to age with heroisms, adventures, and romance; a soul, luminous and glorious with its love of right! I have felt as though I must bring here and read to you the entire correspondence between La Fayette and Washington; not for the effusive affection shown by the young officer for his chieftain, but because his impetuous devotion penetrated that wonderful reserve which has baffled history, and led even so redoubted a patriot as Mr. Ingersoll to say: “Washington has become a steel engraving.”

This correspondence shows him to have been a friend; loyal, faithful, familiar, playful and tender as a father. My friends, it is difficult for youth to worship an abstraction, or a steel engraving; and I ask no other evidence of the intensely human nature of George Washington, in all those qualities which make for comradery and good fellowship, than the intimate friendship between him and

two boys—most remarkable boys, with the brains to appreciate brains, the courage that demands courage, hearts that feed on a heart's emotion; I mean young Hamilton and La Fayette.

As far La Fayette's romance, that one exalted passion which survived all vicissitudes and hung, like an aureola, above the clouds of every battle—it is a theme for song and story! From field and camp, from forum and prison, La Fayette found time and means to write to the mistress of his heart such letters as no woman might read unmoved. And she, the child wife, fairest, gentlest, loveliest of womankind, became through the splendor of her hero's love the wisest, bravest, noblest, best. The reign of terror came, and with it those years of silence and separation; the wife imprisoned in Paris, the husband in Olmütz. What woman "attainted" of noble blood did not change her name, or suffer a mock divorce to escape, if might be, the scalpel of Dr. Guillotin? Not so the wife of La Fayette! If die she must, her death should be worthy the wife of such a husband. Her mother, sister, even the aged grandmother, frail, pitiful victims to the murderous knife, were gone—all gone! But Robespierre was killed and she was saved. Yes, she was loosed from Paris, and like a homing dove flew straight to Olmütz. Yes, freedom, sunlight, God's pure air once more were hers, and in that very hour she knocked at the dungeon of Austria and in the name of charity and love asked, begged, implored, to share the entombment of her husband. The boon was granted with the assurance that it must be forever. And here they lived, in a mephitic twilight, with rags for clothing, and prison fare for food, while months, which seemed years, rolled into years, which seemed eternities. Her health could not withstand this strain. La Fayette, too nobly

proud to ask one favor for himself, petitioned humbly that his wife might go and regain her strength. The leave was given, conditioned that she should not return. Need I assure you that she did not go?

A few years after their deliverance by Napoleon this gracious woman died at the old chateau, attended by her husband. Every act of her life had been a token of her love, but it was reserved for this last illness to reveal its height and depth and amazing plenitude. Her death was the transfiguration, the apotheosis of love. Poor La Fayette could only sit at her bedside and with streaming eyes and breaking heart listen to the gushing ecstasy of her affection. He assured her that she was loved and valued. "Nay!" she said, with wan coquetry, "I care not to be valued if I am only loved. Ah, my husband, there was a period when, after one of your returns from America, I felt myself so forcibly attracted to you that I thought I should faint every time you came into the room. I was possessed with the fear of annoying you, and tried to moderate my feelings. What gratitude I owe to God," she would repeat, "that such passionate feelings should have been a duty!" Again in her delirium she had said: "If you do not find yourself sufficiently loved, lay the fault on God; He hath not given me more faculties than that I love you christianly, humanly, passionately."

I have chosen these sentences from a letter of La Fayette, written in holy confidence to a friend. It seems almost sacrilege that it should ever have been published. And yet, not so. Perhaps, in years to come, some sublimated Zola searching for realism, not in the muckheaps of humanity but in the hearts of God's children, will stumble onto it and learn how real, how true, how beautiful is human love when man is a moral hero and woman his good angel!

But it is not of La Fayette in the private, or home relationships of life that I am here to speak; it is of La Fayette as a moral force in the history of the world—the apparitor of law—the evangel of liberty—the minister of God's will.

When Patrick Henry in the Virginia house of burgesses fulminated against King George III, all Europe smiled at the gasconade of a provincial orator. His voice scarce vibrated beyond the room in which his challenge was so proudly uttered. But when on the field of Lexington our cannon spoke—then spoke an orator with a voice that rang until, like a sounding board, the vaulted sky rang back again! It reverberated in the palaces of kings; it echoed from the abyss of human wretchedness. Fellow citizens, within the palace that very hour there was born a Fear; within the blackness of the abyss there was conceived a Hope.

What did it portend? What did it not portend? It meant that just as the Decalogue issued from the thunders of Sinai, so out of the thunders of the Revolution should proceed the Constitution of the United States, both God-given, thunder-voiced, one in the name of morals, the other in the name of Liberty!

There was about the palace of the king of France at the outbreak of the American revolution this young nobleman of nineteen, the Marquis de La Fayette, whose Christian names are too numerous to mention. He was of the select coterie chosen by Marie Antoinette to perform amateur theatricals in her boudoir and do quadrilles in costume. He had been educated to smile affably, and was a post-graduate in the art of bowing. His alma mater was a dancing school. Three years previously, that is, at the age of sixteen, he had married the daughter of a duke, two years younger than himself.

I have often wondered if human nature was so anomalous in France that children, just entering their teens, could, with safety to the state, to say nothing of the dignity of the home, assume the relationship of marriage—that sublime Duality, as mysterious as the Trinity, and only less sacred. But the language of France contained no such word as “home” until, in modern times, the people of France appropriated the English word; in full reprisal, it seems to me, for all our depredations on their language. As for marriage among the nobility, it was then, as it is to-day, a matter of convention, the conveyance of hereditaments, the merger of estates, with love as a “contingent remainder.” The court of France was utterly debauched. Arrogance had ceased to be arrogance, for the word implies some consciousness, at least, of another’s being; but the patricians of France had ruled so long, so absolute, and so unquestioned, that a southern planter could not have been more oblivious of a negro’s entity than were the French *noblesse* of the existence of mere people. “The state!” cried Louis XIV., “I am the state—*L’etat, c’est Moi.*”

The fortune of this youth was among the largest in Europe. He was accordingly fawned upon by courtiers and humored by the king. If he was thought to be somewhat erratic it was only because he had so little to say, whereas society expected him to prattle. He evinced, moreover, a predilection for his own wife. Except for these slight aberrations he appeared to be as sane, and almost as inane, as nobility in general.

What unsuspected chord in the bosom of this supine aristocrat thrilled in unison with our cannon’s roar? What did his soul behold in the glare of this first powder-flash? God knows! But surely the highest use of history is to register the onward sweep of that “power

which makes for righteousness," and in the knowledge of its trend conform our efforts to a divine intent. Thus, and thus only, may we perceive how mankind is urged forward and forever upward by an inexorable Will, whose special agency is some special Man. This belief is not mysticism; it is all that redeems us from insanity. What happened, then, to La Fayette? What changed him in the twinkling of an eye? What was it that with strange compelling influence drew wise men from the East to worship at a manger? It was a star—God's star of Bethlehem. What was it burst in the brain of Saul, blasting his vision in an agony of light? It was a star—God's star of truth. What was it dawned on the soul of La Fayette, transfusing it with a purpose so sublime that henceforth all he had was offered a willing sacrifice to its accomplishment? It was a star—God's star of liberty. The Declaration of Independence—every sentence of which challenged the special privileges of his class, his own prerogatives, the title he bore, the right of his kingly government to exist—reflected the radiance of this rising sun and glowed with celestial fire. Like an asterisk of destiny, like its fellow of the East, this star of the West hung brightening above the cradle of men's hopes. He needs must follow it!

Accordingly, in April, of the year 1777, La Fayette set sail for America, in a vessel purchased and equipped by himself expressly for the journey. His resolution had been taken against the protest of all his friends (save only of her, the best of friends) and despite the interdiction of his monarch. To circumvent the officers of the latter, he disguised himself as a courier, sleeping in stables from town to town until he reached the seacoast. But Louis XVI. was not to be baffled. He made it known to the American Congress that under no circum-

stances was the Marquis de La Fayette to receive a commission in its armies. Congress was not only willing to oblige the king of France, but, on its own account, thought that the quixotic services of the youthful marquis might prove more embarrassing than useful. Washington, moreover, shared the same opinion. He, poor man, had seen enough of foreign adventurers. So that, upon his arrival, La Fayette was graciously received, and as graciously ignored. It was under these circumstances, and when his cherished plans had little hope of realization, that he addressed to Congress this brief but immortal note :

“After the sacrifices I have made I have the right to exact two favors: one is to serve at my own expense, the other is to serve as a volunteer.”

There was no mistaking the temper or quality of the writer of these lines! Washington relented at once. La Fayette received his commission and was appointed aide-de-camp to the commander-in-chief. “Thereupon,” says a biographer, “began one of those tender and lasting friendships which exist between men who share great perils in defense of great principles.”

They reached the camp of Washington in time to witness a review of troops. There were 11,000 men, possibly the forlornest ever calling themselves an army. Their munitions were wretched, their clothing ragged, and without any attempt at uniformity in cut or color; their evolutions were original, not to say grotesque. But they were Americans, and Washington was their leader.

“We should feel some embarrassment,” Washington observed, “in showing ourselves to an officer who has just left the armies of France.”

“Sir,” replied La Fayette, “it is to learn and not to teach that I am here.”

There spoke, not simply the modesty of the man, but if there be any design or meaning in the affairs of men, there spoke his destiny. He was here to learn!

To learn what? To learn first of all, and all in all, Washington by heart! To learn his Godlike integrity of nature—his singleness of purpose and loyalty of faith—his wisdom—his justice—his goodness—his loving kindness—his prudence in counsel—his courage in action—his deep respect of self, combined with a divine unselfishness—his majesty of patience in defeat—his almost melancholy joy in victory. To learn Washington was to learn what God meant when he made us in His image; it was to know Man, the archetype! Here was a provincial farmer whose pride of manhood, compared with the insolence of a king, soared into the empyrean, and yet who thought so little of the habiliments of power that all he asked of fortune or of fate were the tranquillity of Mt. Vernon and the obscurity of his home. What dignity could such greatness borrow from a title! To imagine Washington as a marquis was to imagine him with a ring in his nose. To know him as a man was to know what freedom meant, what free men were, and how to men like these “liberty or death” was *the* dread alternative. La Fayette renounced his marquisate and by act of Congress was made Citizen of America.

It is not my intention to catalogue the services of La Fayette to this country, either as a soldier on our battle-fields or as a diplomat at the court of France. We teach our children to cherish those services in grateful and lasting memory. But there were two episodes of the war which so clearly reveal the character of this more than patriot that no estimate of him would be complete without referring to them.

After the treachery of Arnold and his desertion to the

enemy, it transpired that the American forces under La Fayette found themselves confronting the English forces commanded by the traitor. One day a nuncio from the latter, under a flag of truce, sought an interview with La Fayette and handed him a letter. Learning from whom the letter was sent, La Fayette returned it to the messenger unopened, stating that a communication from any other British officer would be courteously received, but under no circumstances would he so much as open a letter from Mr. Arnold. "Mr. Arnold" was furious of course, and Americans were threatened with condign punishment. But when news of the incident reached the ears of Washington he wrote to La Fayette: "Your conduct upon every occasion meets my approbation, but in none more than in refusing to hold a correspondence with Arnold."

Again, when La Fayette was sent south in Virginia to hold Cornwallis in check, the latter thought he had "the boy," as he called him, where he might not escape and so boasted in one of his reports. But it came to pass that "the boy" maneuvered him into a *cul de sac*.

There seems to be little doubt that, in conjunction with the French fleet, a battle with the enemy could have been fought and won, and the French officers, naval and military, vehemently urged that, having cornered the Englishman in Yorktown, it was due to La Fayette that he go further and achieve the glory of his final conquest. But the friend of Washington shook his head. "It is my duty," said he, "to guard the enemy until Washington arrives; to him, to him alone, belongs the glory of this *coup de grace*."

If so be, at first, in the exuberance of youth, or the ennui of inaction, La Fayette took up liberty as a plaything and diversion, it had now become the passion of his

life. Like Washington, he saw and realized the horror of African slavery.

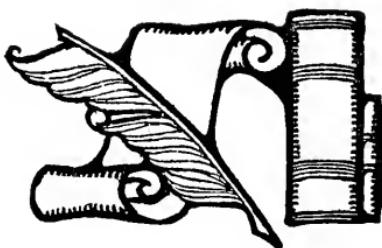
“Whatever may be the complexion of the enslaved,” he writes to Mr. Adams, “does not, in my opinion, change the complexion of the crime, which is blacker than the face of any African.” With a view to the ultimate extinction of this anomaly in our government, he founded an African colony on the island of Cayenne, hoping to educate the negro into a sense of freedom and individuality. But the task seemed hopeless. And, indeed, with the surrender of Cornwallis, he felt that his mission in the world had been accomplished. It was in this belief that he wrote to the French minister, Vergennes: “My great affair is settled. Humanity has gained its cause and liberty will never be without a refuge.”

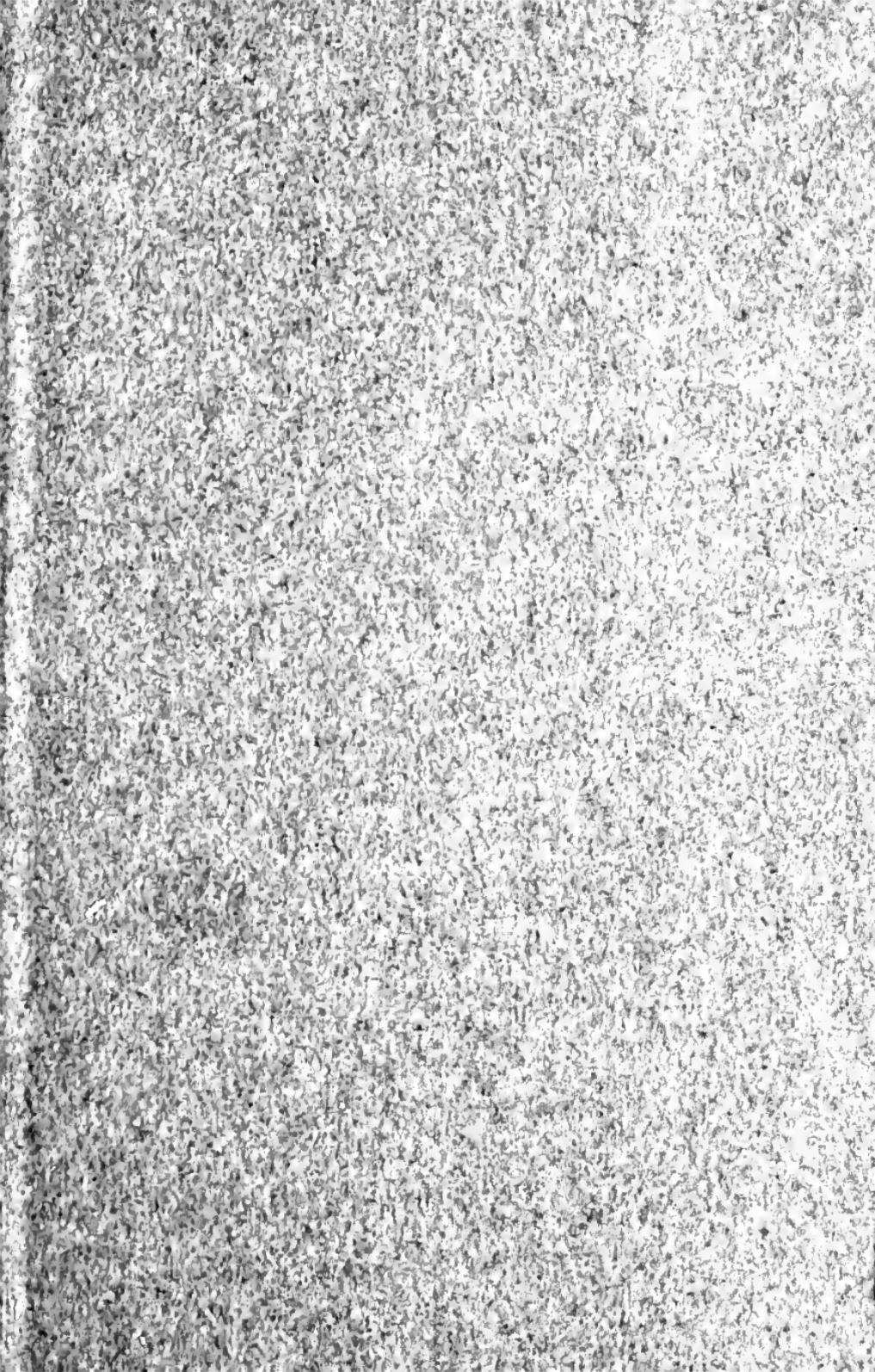
How purblind is man, who cannot see beyond his eyelashes nor prophesy from day to day what a day will bring forth! His affairs were not settled; his great affair was yet to be. For however great had been La Fayette’s career in America (and no American will attempt to dwarf it), it was but an apprenticeship, a novitiate in the cause of liberty which all too soon was to rage tumultuous in the heart of France. For I repeat it: he was here to learn. Our war with England was not simply a political insurrection: it was an insurrection of ideas.

When, therefore, La Fayette returned to France, it was not as an effigy of liberty, but as liberty’s incendiary. His soul, like a torch, had been lighted at that star which first beckoned him away, and like a torch he flung it among the dry and sapless institutions of his country. The conflagration, the holocaust, the nameless crackling which ensued, we call the French Revolution.

I could not, if I would, portray the venomous writhings of this infernal orgasm; Carlyle has done it in a vertigo of words. What I would impress upon you is the fact that except for La Fayette this revolution never would have been. He it was who inspired it, ruled it, was ruled by it, emerged from it to confront the sordid splendor of Napoleon with the glory of Washington, survived it—tyranny, anarchy, despotism—survived it all, and then died, like Moses, in sight of the promised land.

France, I salute you! In the name of La Fayette, whom you sent to us; in the name of Washington, whom we returned to you, America joins with you, O sister of liberty, in that shout which yet shall engirdle the earth—“The King is dead! Long live the Republic!”





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